



Prayer for the Lonely

By Andrew Gardner, Union Chapel Heritage and Outreach Worker.

Gracious God,

Lent is a time for reflection, a time to pause, a time to examine our faith and our selves, and so soon after Epiphany. A time to reflect on the book of Ecclesiastes, so beautifully set to music. For some it is a difficult time, with Lent beginning in the same week as St Valentine's Day, with all the aggressive marketing in the High Street and in the media that comes with it - it seems inescapable. But it does also help those alone to think of Your own time in the wilderness, and ponder in wider contexts the Easter story.

Gracious God, let those who are lonely be enveloped by Your Spirit, may she hold them closely, wrapped up in the love of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. May Your love surround those who need Your care at this time. Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, we ask Your peace and blessings on those who feel isolated.

AMEN

Poem from a Church Member

LOCK OUT

LOCK IN

A door closed to lock out anger
A door closed to lock in anger
Where...

A door closed to lock out violence
A door closed to lock in violence
Where...

A door closed to lock out protection
A door closed to lock in protection
Where...

A door closed to lock out pain
A door closed to lock in pain
Where...

A door closed to lock out mercy
A door closed to lock in mercy



Where...

A door closed to lock out love
A door closed to lock in love
Where...

A door closed to lock out freedom
A door closed to lock in freedom
Where...

A door closed to lock out hope
A door closed to lock in hope
Where...

A door closed to lock out grace
A door closed to lock in grace
Where...

A door closed to lock out faith
A door closed to lock in faith
Where...

A door closed to lock out justice
A door closed to lock in justice
Where...

A door closed to lock out church
A door closed to lock in church
Where...

In all places, Jesus is witness
His ministry knows no boundaries
Watching attempts to lock in and lock out His vision for all
Across all peoples and nations

At all times, Christ Crucified is present
His open wounds, proceed our broken world
Walking through doors giving miraculous transformation for all
Across all peoples and nations

In all beings, God is searching
Calling each and every living being to His love, grace and hope



Willing mankind to seek what is beyond every closed door
Across all peoples and nations

Holy Spirit
Come that we may seek to walk like Jesus
To always seek to walk in your presence, through locked doors
Come! Let us move our souls, bodies, hearts and minds as we are called!

Prayers for Tolerance

By Andrew Gardner, Union Chapel Heritage and Outreach Worker.

Today marks the anniversary of the liberation of the survivors of Auschwitz in 1945. The United Nations marks it as Holocaust Memorial Day, which is marked in Israel as Holocaust Remembrance Day on 7 April. We ask in Your mercy peace for the souls of all who perished in those times.

We said in 1945 that we would not permit such evil to happen again. We failed. Gracious God, give us the strength and willingness to prevail over evil and dictatorship. Let us never lose faith in peace and diplomacy in our efforts. We think of those around the world today, in Africa and in the Middle East who suffer violence, and we pray that they may see it ended. We pray for those still scarred by the wars in Yugoslavia.
Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In the week of Prayer for Christian Unity we pray for the people of Northern Ireland, whose overwhelming vote for peace after the Good Friday Agreement continues to be disrupted by a minority, who refuse to accept other traditions. We give thanks for the tolerance we have in this country, and for being able to provide refuge for people of all faiths over recent centuries. We pray for the willingness to accept and welcome people of all faiths. There exist many paths towards You.
Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those in this new year who are planning their weddings, including Protestant-Catholic unions, and inter-faith marriages. We give thanks that we have the freedom in this space to conduct them, and wish your blessings upon them. We give thanks that we have the freedom to welcome any same-sex couples who approach us.

Let tolerance prevail in this world, and give us the strength and willingness always to be forward, never to give up.
Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**
AMEN



Loss and Hope

By Andrew Gardner , Union Chapel Heritage and Outreach Worker

Psalm 125

James 2, 1-10

Proverbs 22, 1-2 and 8-9

Mark 7, 24-37

At first it was hard for me to see how to put these passages together. On a literal reading, little links them. Then it came to me: they are not intended for a literal reading. They give us time for thought. They are about loss, but more importantly, of hope.

The psalmist writes of a lost people, driven from their land. So he does, but we are not required to read it with that single thought. The thought of loss, in every possible sense of the word, bears with us, sometimes crushes us. But the psalmist provides what we need above all: hope. Psalm 125, committed to memory, has sustained people through the most terrible times.

Mark too tells us of hope, of a child outside faith healed - and what greater hope is there than the health of one's child? It is our primal, driving instinct.

James tells us of prejudice. Prejudice takes many forms, much of it knocked to pieces by the Paralympics which have been an inspiration. How could anyone ever again be patronising towards somebody with such determine, drive and athleticism? My own body is put to shame.

James also tells us of those times when we should be mindful of those who are where we might be, whose circumstances have come between them and their future. It can be intensely difficult, whether physically or psychologically, to move forward from there. They are not beneath us any more than we are above them. We carry the same sins and carry the same graces. As the Proverb says, "The rich and the poor have this in common: The Lord is maker of them all".

Prayers based on John 15 v 9-17 - Karen Stallard, Union Chapel Minister



*Jesus is preparing to leave...
Leaving his disciples with these words ...
They are being left behind, to follow on afterwards.*

Gracious God;

For those who have been abandoned
May they know the words of your faithful love dwell within them
May they know the presence of one who chooses to love them beside them
May they know the arms of one who calls them a friend around them
May they know a sense of purpose and connection in a loving community.

For those who know little of what it is to be loved
May they begin to experience a love which is untainted by human mistakes
May they open their hearts to become vulnerable to a love which will fill their
unlovely gaps
May they begin to love as they are being loved
May they believe in their hearts and minds that they are loved deeply and
sacrificially.

For those who feel directionless and without purpose
May they join communities which love others through words and action
May they build relationships with those who have direction and purpose and learn
from them
May they discover within themselves their gifts to be shared in the world



For those who feel unequal and subservient to others
May they know the joy of an equal friendship
May they experience powerful people acting in humility before them
May they be set free from any chains of slavery
May they know in their hearts that they are held equally with others in your eyes.

For those who feel like they have never been wanted or chosen
May they know a sense of your calling in their lives
May they experience friends choosing to be with them and know the reality of that choice
May they rest assured in the knowledge that they have ultimately been chosen by you and given life because they are loved.

Amen